

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 299449 TOSEC 320117

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SUBJECT: PRESS MATERIAL

1. HERewith FULL TEXT JOSEPH KRAFT OP-ED COLUMN WASHINGTON POST THURSDAY DECEMBER 9 HEADED "THE PUSH MUST COME FROM THE MIDEAST."

2. A PUSH, NOT TO SAY RUSH, IS UNDER WAY IN ALL QUARTERS FOR A NEW GO AT SETTLEMENT IN THE MIDEAST. BUT THE IN-COMING ADMINISTRATION NEEDS TO SORT OUT POSSIBILITIES AND ANALYZE PROPOSALS.

3. THE BEST WAY TO BUY THE TIME IS NOT THE USUAL DEVICE OF SENDING ABROAD A PRESTIGIOUS EMISSARY. A FAR BETTER WAY TO GET A HANDLE ON THE MIDEAST IS TO BRING TO WASHINGTON, FOR SEPARATE MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER AND HIS AIDES, THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL AND THE THREE NEIGHBORING ARAB STATES.

4. THE MOST VISIBLE MOVER BEHIND THE NEW MOMENTUM FOR SETTLEMENT IS EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT. NO AMERICAN SENATOR, REPRESENTATIVE OR JOURNALIST HAS BEEN TO CAIRO

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 STATE 299449 TOSEC 320117

RECENTLY WITHOUT GETTING AN EARFUL OF SADAT'S EAGERNESS TO

RESUME PEACE NEGOTIATIONS THROUGH A GENEVA CONFERENCE. NOR

DOES THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT MINCE WORDS ABOUT HIS READINESS TO "END THE STATE OF WAR" IN RETURN FOR ISRAEL CONCESSIONS OF OCCUPIED TERRITORY TO EGYPT, OTHER ARAB STATES AND THE PALESTINIANS.

5. PRESIDENT HAFEZ ASSAD OF SYRIA, ONCE A PRIME OBSTACLE TO FURTHER PEACE MOVES, HAS NOW CHANGED HIS POSITION. IN RETURN FOR EGYPTIAN APPROVAL OF SYRIA'S VIRTUAL OCCUPATION OF LEBANON, HE IS NO LONGER OPPOSING SADAT'S INITIATIVE FOR PEACE. AS HE PUT IT IN AN INTERVIEW LAST WEEK: "I AM NOT SAYING THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT FOR SETTLEMENT."

6. KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN, ISRAEL'S THIRD ARAB NEIGHBOR, HAS FAVORED TALKS AT ALL TIMES. WITH NEITHER EGYPT NOR SYRIA NOW BARRING THE WAY, HE CAN BE MORE FORTHCOMING THAN EVER IN EXPRESSING HIS INTEREST IN A SETTLEMENT.

7. PERHAPS THE BIGGEST CHANGE HAS BEEN IN ISRAEL. AFTER A BRIEF SPELL OF SOUR COMMENT ON THE EGYPTIAN INITIATIVES, PRIME MINISTER YITZHAK RABIN HAS GONE ONTO THE PEACE OFFENSIVE HIMSELF. WHILE SOME BELIEVE HE HAS TURNED ABOUT ONLY FOR PROPAGANDA REASONS, MY STRONG IMPRESSION IS THAT THE PLAY OF INTERNAL POLITICS PRECEDING THE ELECTION DUE NEXT YEAR FORCES HIM TO COME OUT AS A LEADER WHO CAN BRING THE SETTLEMENT MOST ISRAELIS WANT.

8. WHATEVER THE SINCERITY OF THESE VARIOUS PROFESSIONS OF INTEREST IN SETTLEMENT, NO ONE IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD WANT TO LET THE OPPORTUNITY SLIP AWAY UNTESTED. THE UNITED STATES IN PARTICULAR, AS THE POWER ALL COUNTRIES IN THE AREA NOW LOOK TO FOR DIPLOMATIC LEADERSHIP, HAS A SPECIAL INTEREST IN MAINTAINING MOMENTUM TOWARD SETTLEMENT

9. THE TEMPTATION IS TO FOLLOW THE PRECEDENT SET BY WILLIAM SCRANTON FOR PRESIDENT NIXON IN 1968 OF EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES THROUGH THE AGENCY OF A HIGH-RANKING TRAVELING EMISSARY. BUT A VISITING DIGNITARY IS BOUND TO RAISE FALSE HOPES EITHER AMONG ISRAELIS OR ARABS. MOREOVER,
UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 STATE 299449 TOSEC 320117

AFTER THE MISSION, IT BECOMES INCUMBENT UPON THE UNITED STATES TO COME FORWARD WITH PROPOSALS. THE MONKEY IS ON WASHINGTON'S BACK.

10. BUT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION, UNLESS IT WANTS TO SPOIL THE PRESENT OPPORTUNITY, OUGHT TO LEAVE THE INITIATIVE FOR NEW PROPOSALS WITH THE LOCAL PARTIES FOR SOME TIME TO COME. THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF AMBIGUITY IN WHAT

IS NOW BEING SAID, AND THERE OUGHT NOT TO BE AN AMERICAN

RESPONSE UNTIL AFTER THE NEW PRESIDENT AND HIS CHIEF AIDES
HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO PROBE EXACTLY WHAT THE LOCAL LEADERS
HAVE IN MIND.

11. SADAT, FOR EXAMPLE, IS CLOUDY TO THE POINT OF DOING
A SNOW JOB IN HIS TALK OF "AN END TO THE STATE OF WAR."
ASSAD IS A QUANTITY ALMOST UNKNOWN TO ALL AMERICANS EXCEPT
SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY KISSINGER; INDEED, ASSAD MADE A
JOKING REFERENCE TO THAT CONDITION BY OBSERVING THAT HE
WAS THE "ONLY ARAB LEADER WHO SPOKE ENGLISH WITH A GERMAN
ACCENT."

12. THOUGH HUSSEIN AND RABIN ARE WELL KNOWN IN WASHINGTON,
BOTH OUGHT TO BE QUESTIONED CLOSELY ON SPECIFIC MATTERS.
IT IS UNCLEAR TO WHAT DEGREE THE KING COULD ACT AS A COVER
FOR BRINGING PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVES TO THE NEGOTI-
ATING TABLE, AND ALSO WHAT RELATION JORDAN MIGHT HAVE WITH
A PALESTINIAN STATE. IT IS EQUALLY UNCLEAR HOW MUCH ROOM
FOR POLITICAL MANEUVER RABIN HAS --PARTICULARLY ON RETURN
OF TERRITORIES--WITH AN ELECTION COMING UP.

13. BY INVITING ALL FOUR LEADERS TO WASHINGTON FOR
SEPARATE MEETINGS AT AN EARLY DATE, CARTER KEEPS UP THE
MOMENTUM FOR SETTLEMENT. HE RESERVES TO HIMSELF AND HIS
AIDES THE POSSIBILITY OF DISCOVERING FIRSTHAND THE TRUE
POSTURES OF LEADERS WHO, FOR INTERNAL POLITICAL REASONS,
TEND TO MASK THEIR VIEWS. AT THE SAME TIME HE KEEPS WHAT
THE UNITED STATES MOST NEEDS BEFORE COMING FORWARD WITH
PROPOSALS--AND OPEN MIND. (END TEXT.) ROBINSON
UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 04 STATE 299449 TOSEC 320117

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